

## Abstract

Anna Golus

### **Examining the participation of children in reality TV shows in the context of child's status in family and society. The case of *Supernanny***

Polish version of a British reality TV programme *Supernanny*, featuring psychologist Dorota Zawadzka, was aired on Polish television channel TVN between 2006 and 2008. This makeover show is based on a simple franchise formula: Supernanny visits family homes and helps parents to regain control over their disobedient children. The results are astonishing, as in a period of barely two weeks, Supernanny manages to transform 'little devils' into 'little angels'. Such formula, however, remains highly questionable, as the behavioural approaches to child-rearing and parenting promoted in the show encompass controlling and disciplinary techniques aiming to 'break' the will of a disobedient child.

This thesis uses *Supernanny* as a case study that offers an in-depth analysis and critique of the reality TV programmes involving nonadult participants. It firstly argues that such programmes break children's right to privacy, often alongside their rights to dignity, freedom of expression and express child's views. Secondly, it demonstrates that children do not participate in such shows but instead their attendance is contravolitional, meaning without their permission or even against their will. Thirdly, children featuring in such programmes continue to be portrayed in very unfavourable ways, for example as responsible for their family's problems and/or as the broken toys which must be fixed. This way of presenting and treatment of children in reality TV is further argued to be an act of objectification, dehumanisation and symbolic violence. Thus, following Bourdieu, this thesis concludes that symbolic violence experienced by children 'participants', is not 'purely spiritual violence which ultimately has no real effects', but is a requisite condition for other forms of violence.

Although *Supernanny* Dorota Zawadzka (similarly as Jo Frost featuring in the original programme) criticises physical violence against children, this makeover show supports parent-child relationship based on violence, psychological abuse, emotional neglect and conditional love. Consequences of fostering this kind of relationships and parenting in the reality television are far-reaching, as popular media continue to play a key role in the intergenerational transmission and (re)production of cultural patterns that endlessly communicate the notion that 'children should be seen and not heard'. In this sense, programmes such as *Supernanny* do not only support but also reinforce discrimination against children, adultism and children's low status in family and society.